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In Defence of 'The Destruction of Reason'

Twenty years ago for the 1985 Lukács centenary I wrote an article in defense of *The Destruction of Reason*.¹ The title suggested that Lukács' book had been taken so badly that anyone finding anything positive in it was necessarily on the defensive.

This year is the fiftieth anniversary of its publication. The conditions, or even the possibility of interpreting the once influential and seminal work has changed again significantly since the eighties. Today the question is not if any of its arguments are feasible, but if it is still readable at all.

It is unnecessary to touch on its causes. It is sufficient to mention that the social political epoch Lukács (despite his originality and stand-off position) had a decisive role creating, expressing and legitimizing is now over. While in the middle of the eighties conferences were organized commemorating the centenary of Lukács' birth, today his oeuvre, and especially *The Destruction of Reason*, at least in Hungary, has hardly any readers. I consider this a loss. Both as the mirror of his age with its positive and negative lessons, and for the sake of its original values it would be worth preserving Lukács' heritage as living part of our culture. Paraphrasing the title of Benedetto Croce's famous book on Hegel, it would be time now to weigh what is 'living' and what is 'dead' in Lukács' philosophy.

¹ János Kelemen, "Az ész trónfosztása" védelmében. In: *Világosság*, 1986/3. 137-143.

Here I can not propose view-points, letting alone a general framework of the systematic account for Lukacs' heritage. I only suggest that some of Lukacs' analyses in *The Destruction of Reason* are deeper and more complicated than one would assume in the light of his otherwise usually partisan and summary judgments.

In the article from 1985 I distinguished the 'external' and 'internal' defenses of *The Destruction of Reason*. 'External' defense meant taking into account the circumstances of its writing – the then fresh memories of fascism and World War II, and the political conditions of the early fifties. 'Internal' defense meant the positive assessment of the book's substantive thoughts and analyses; i.e. trying to prove that though the argumentation is often undoubtedly biased, there are certain analyses and claims that are valid not only within the context of those times.

Today I am not sure if this distinction is the appropriate one, and most probably Lukacs himself would not find it apt either. However, I would not say that only some parts, 'certain analyses and claims' are valid, and the overall train of thought is completely mistaken.

It is inevitable, though, that we have to search for the 'living' elements of Lukacs' philosophy mostly on the level of details and concrete analyses. His general theory about the history of philosophy, and his theoretical framework should rather be labeled as the 'dead' part of his heritage. The same applies to his interpretation of the history of "bourgeois" philosophy after Schelling. He tells a logically necessary, inversely teleological story of decline where all the successive elements seem to tend towards fascism. Irrationalism gaining strength generation

by generation supersede reason and the values of rationalism.² Fascist ideology appears to be the direct consequence of the development (or rather, the decline) of bourgeois philosophy.

This assumption is not only theoretically problematic, but also empirically unfeasible, since there is no factual justification for the supposedly overall and general irrationalism of modern philosophy. Lukacs left out of consideration those important 20th century philosophers, who, like himself, were also ardent critics of irrationalism. He ignored that schools like the Vienna circle and the analytical philosophers were trying to apply the rational norms of modern science, technology and democracy in philosophy. And let us not forget that Lukacs, in the spirit of the logics of 'either-or', contrasted the irrationalism of bourgeois philosophy with soviet ideology, which he conceived as the only true trustee of the values of rationalism and rationality.

Nevertheless, it can not be claimed unequivocally that whatever is enduring in Lukacs' work belongs to certain minor details, while his general philosophical conception is completely outdated. As for *The Destruction of Reason* it is indisputable (and is echoed by many thinkers and writers from various intellectual traditions), that irrationalist philosophical currents had an important role to play in the emergence of fascism. The in-dept and detailed analysis of this role was and still is an important *philosophical* task. Even if there is no direct causal relation between fascism and the irrationalist tendencies starting from Schelling and Schopenhauer, even if it is nonsensical to blame Nietzsche for the barbarous nazi ideals, it is beyond question that nazism grew out of a culture saturated with irrationalism. This relationship, as all the explainable relationships in history, can only be determined

² According to some critics Lukacs considers all kinds of idealism irrational. See e.g. H. A. Hodges, "Lukács on Irrationalists". In: G. H. R. Parkinson (Ed.), *Georg Lukács – The man, his Work and his Ideas*. Cox, Wyman, Fakenahm, London, 1970. 87.

retrospectively - as such a relationship in reality is established retrospectively only. As Susan Sontag puts it: “much of nineteenth-century German culture is, retroactively, haunted by Hitler.”³ Actually, Lukacs also often depicts irrationalism as part of the prelude to fascism - a *prerequisite*, but not its exclusive *cause*. His main thesis is that the influence irrationalism previously had in German culture (both high and mass) was conducive to the gaining ground of fascism. The thesis can be generalized: if high and mass cultures are soaked by irrationalist ideals, fascist-type movements have a broader latitude, and the possibility of a fascist type seizure of power is higher. In this general form the thesis is feasible if we add that on the level of such an abstract historical generalization it makes more sense to speak about totalitarianism, or even totalitarianisms (in the plural) instead of fascism.

From the relationship outlined above it follows, that attacks on reason – bone fide and mala fide alike -, are dangerous. As Lukacs puts it, it is the duty of the philosophers “to supervise the existence and evolution of reason”⁴ This is true, indeed. Actually, what Lukacs teaches us here is a pretty banal truth.

The antagonism of rationalism and irrationalism in the first half of the 20th century was the main watershed of different philosophical schools. As Popper stated, “the conflict between rationalism and irrationalism has become the most important intellectual, and perhaps even moral, issue of our time”.⁵ In the half century since the appearance of *The Destruction of Reason* debates about the demarcation and delineation of rationalism and irrationalism, or rationality and irrationality has remained central in ethics, philosophy of science,

³ Susan Sontag, *Syberberg's Hitler*. In: Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. 151. (Sontag remarks that „nineteenth-century Russian culture is not Haunted by Stalin”. Analyzing what this means and what not would take us far from our topic.)

⁴ George Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*. London: The Merlin Press, 1980. 91.

⁵ K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row, New York, Evanston 1962. II. 224.

philosophical psychology, rational choice and action theory, political philosophy and other philosophical disciplines. The problem is a complicated one, and there might not be an answer at all. And difficulties occur particularly in relation to irrationality, and not rationality. For it is easy to trace the presence of some element of rationality in any intentional act, but, paradoxically, the possibility of irrationality requires further explanation. According to Donald Davidson, the real problem is “how can we explain, or even tolerate as possible, irrational thoughts, actions, or emotions?”⁶ In this respect we should speak about the paradox of irrationality.⁷

If the existence of irrational acts and thoughts is paradoxical, then even more paradoxical is the philosophy denying the basic rational characteristics of human thinking, and claiming that the main forces of human life are irrational. That is to say, irrationalism is a paradoxical doctrine. This, leaving aside all the political and ideological motives, confirms in itself Lukacs’ attack on irrationality.

But what is exactly the target of Lukacs’ attack? What does he consider the main traits of irrationalism? Unfortunately, in contrast to Popper, he has no brief and general definition neither of rationalism, nor of irrationalism. Popper’s study on the history and political impacts of irrationalism is the obvious starting point of comparison, even if the two thinkers are on different political and ideological sides.

⁶ Donald Davidson, „Paradoxes of Irrationality”. In: Donald Davidson, *Problems of Rationality*. Clarendon Press, Oxford 2004. 170.

⁷ Op. Cit. 174. The source of the paradox is that there is no *entirely* rational act or thought. Moravia mentions this intuition: „L’azione è una cosa razionale di per sé: quando agisci, anche quando sbagli, dvi credere di fare la cosa giusta. [...] L’azione è consequenziale, razionale.” Alberto Moravia – Alain Elkann, *Vita di Moravia*. Bompiani, Milano 1990. 103.

For a brief comparison it is worth remembering that irrationalism, writes Popper, is a doctrine about human nature, according to which “emotions and passions rather than reason are the mainsprings of human action.”⁸ Its other characteristics are traditionalism, tribalism and, primarily, historicism. Popper does not attempt to give a causal explanation of such a theory, since he is convinced that an explanation would only support irrationalism, for suggesting that thoughts may depend on circumstances external to the logical structure of arguments (like emotions, historical and social structures) in itself leads to irrationalism.

Because of his objectives, Lukacs analyzes irrationalism in relation to social problems, more specifically, in relation to historical changes. He considers it a modern phenomenon that occur only within the horizon of advanced capitalism. The obvious objection that ‘irrationalistic’ trends did occur in earlier periods in the history of philosophy can be refuted by arguing in the Lukacsian spirit that those tendencies were only precursors to *real* irrationalisms. Their difference can only be grasped in causal social terms, that is, by referring to the social problems in the background of the earlier forms of irrationalistic thinking and the full-fledged modern irrationalism. The latter is the product of a new era of social crisis. This new kind of crisis is different from earlier forms of social crises in the sense that it is not accompanied neither by the break-up of the civilizational foundations of society, nor the decline of technology and science. These disintegrations were experienced in early Medieval times. But it might not be accurate to speak about a new period of crisis. It is the whole pattern of social development that changed substantially, and became more and more controversial and contradictory. Technical, scientific and social development involves the deterioration of values, increased exploitation and inhumanity. Increasing rationality on the level of partial subsystems brings along the irrationality of the system as a whole. The

⁸ K. R. Popper, Op. Cit. 233.

development of capitalism projects the end of capitalism: the progress that creates the existential foundation of bourgeoisie leads to its fall as a class. In this analysis, of course, it is easy to recognize Marx's and Engel's teaching on the nature and role of capitalism in the historical process.

Lukacs' explanation, stemming from the Marxist analysis of capitalism, introduces new conceptual tools. The first is the notion of pessimism. The crisis of progress, and the feeling of this crisis leads to pessimism. This pessimism is deepened further by the anxiety of the bourgeoisie over its desperate historical fate. In this light irrationalist philosophy expresses that faith in progress and future is shaken among the intelligentsia articulating the interests of the bourgeoisie.

The other conceptual tool is the notion of the opacity or nontransparency and "objective irrationality" of society as a whole, which is in contrast with the rationality of subsystems of production, social organization and the now indispensable scientific research. This ambiguity of historical progress and society as a whole seems to confirm that our lives and history are shaped by enigmatic and inaccessible blind forces. In this line of reasoning, the rationality of the subsystems strengthens irrationalism because it proves that rationalization of life leads to new and previously inexperienced problems reason has no power to tackle.

A third conceptual tool arise from the imperilment of the interest of bourgeoisie. Since the logic of capitalism jeopardizes the future of bourgeoisie, it is in the interest of this bourgeoisie to conceal this process and characterize the overall historical process as irrational.

These deductions are causal. They are causal not in the conventional sense that causality is a relation between events, but in the more general sense that complex structures are caused and can be explained by other complex structures. In our case a causal relationship can be discovered between capitalism as a global system and irrationalist philosophy as the expression of bourgeois worldview. In the language of Lukacs' earlier philosophy, it is to say that the explanation for the emergence and dissemination of irrationalism is that it expresses the "imputed" or "possible" consciousness ("zugerechnetes Bewusstsein") of bourgeoisie. This is of course the terminology of *History and Class Consciousness*. Its utilizability suggests that there is a continuity between the explanatory patterns of *The Destruction of Reason* and *History and Class Consciousness*.

I deem Lukacs' above recapitulated explanation of irrationalism as plausible, both in historical and substantive respect, for the periods taken into consideration, at least to the point that irrationalism is in fact the causal result of the crisis culminating in the World War One, Bolshevik revolution and fascism. In this regard, Lukacs' analysis of irrationalism, to say the least, is on a par with any other possible explanation of irrationalism.

From a *formal* point of view this explanation follows the very pattern that we generally use when accounting for irrational beliefs. The explanation of irrational beliefs, thoughts and acts are typically causal, but nothing more. We should here keep in mind the distinction of believing something on the basis of certain *reasons* (i.e. because of the consistency of our beliefs with other confirmed knowledge), and believing something on the basis of certain *causes* (i.e. because our beliefs are determined by factors, such as feelings and passions and the like that are outside the realm of thinking, consideration and reflection. More precisely, there is a difference in the *cause* of beliefs - it can either be a *reason*, or a *cause*, which is

external to the content of the belief held. Typical examples for the latter are self-deception and wishful thinking, which phenomena are widely examined by psychoanalysts and rational choice theorists. This distinction solves the paradox of irrationality by elucidating how irrationality is possible.

The thesis above can be put like this: there are two ways of analyzing rational beliefs. We can examine their *rationale*, that is their epistemological grounds or *reason*, and their genesis or *cause*, seeking thereby a *causal explanation* for them. Whatever the basis of a rational belief (even the belief in *ratio*) is, we can argue for it, we can give reasons for it. We are rational if we accept a belief on the basis of rational arguments, namely because of recognizing reasons that justify them. In case of irrational beliefs these two distinct modes of analysis are not possible.

Lukacs' reference to interests, specifically to the *class interests* of bourgeoisie has the same pattern as the explanations of self-deceit and wishful thinking. Interests (interests in general and class interest in the Marxist terminology alike) can explain irrational beliefs, held individually and collectively alike.

If irrationalism is causally determined by societal structure, class interest or other supra-rational factors, it is in itself irrational to believe in irrationalism. This banal but important conclusion saves us from a fallacy. From the assumption that to explain mental phenomena is to *rationalize* them, we might wrongly infer (as suggested often by psychoanalytical explanations) that mental phenomena, which are objects of the explanation, are rational only because they have explanation (because they are rationalized). The espousal of irrational

beliefs might be in our interest, but this does not render these beliefs rational. Generally, their causal deductibility from the state of the factual world never renders them rational.

Lukacs tries to give a summary characterization of irrationalism by pin-pointing the crucial “decisive hallmarks” many times. It is worth quote the following: “Its [irrationalism’s] history therefore hinges on the development of science and philosophy, and it reacts to the new questions they pose by designating the mere problem as an answer and declaring the allegedly fundamental insolubility of the problem to be a higher form of comprehension. This styling of the declared insolubility as an answer, along with the claim that this evasion and side-stepping of the answer, this flight from it, contains a positive solution and ‘true’ achievement of reality is irrationalism’s decisive hallmark.”⁹ Lukacs here (and elsewhere too) attempts to give a historical, but not a substantive description, though here he tries to approach the phenomenon not from the basis of social circumstances, but from the history of thinking. Let me emphasize two points. First, irrationalism, as defined above, hinges on the progress of science and philosophy – it is a reaction to the questions and problems brought up and left unresolved by science and philosophy. As Lukacs puts it, “Irrationalism is merely a form of reaction (reaction in the double sense of the secondary and the retrograde) to the dialectical development of human thought”.¹⁰ Second, I would stress that irrationalism for Lukacs is “evasion”.

From the two points it is the moment of “evasion” which explains irrationalism substantively. It states that irrationalist philosophers refuse to answer the real problems, and from the very existence of these problems they infer that there is and there can not be a rational answer for them. This Lukacs considers the “decisive hallmark” from which he deduces further

⁹ George Lukács, *Op. Cit.* 104.

constitutive elements of irrationalism - intuitionism, aristocratism, agnosticism and historicism. The latter he conceives a “decadent bourgeois theory which automatically interpreted the historical as ‘singular’, unique’ and contradicting the concept of law, thus irrational by nature to a certain extent”.¹¹ He, in contrast to Popper, does not distinguish naturalist and antinaturalist versions of historicism. This implies that he primarily considers irrationalist those who, by opposing nature and history, deny that in history there are either natural or specifically historical laws.

Neither Popper, nor Lukacs was right to assume that any kind of historicism is necessarily irrationalist. But as for the history of philosophy, Lukacs rightly supposed that 19th and early 20th century “antinaturalist” historicism was more prone to irrationalism, and that irrationalism is usually related to those theories that reject causal explanations in history, and instead propose empathy and identification with agents as the method of historical understanding.

While the concept of “evasion” in the definition above is the concentrate of the substantive traits of irrationalism, the moment of “reaction” brings us back to the realm of causal explanations and, strangely enough, implies that irrationalism does not have its own history. And, indeed, this is how Lukacs consistently argues. He actually embraces a stronger version denying not only that irrationalism has its own history, but that irrationalism as such can have history at all – “irrationalism cannot possibly have a unified, coherent history like, for instance, materialism or dialectics.”¹² This is absolutely in-line with his attempt to originate the per definitionem modern phenomenon of irrationalism from Schelling’s philosophy.

¹⁰ Ibidem

¹¹ George Lukács, Op. Cit. 125.

¹² Ibidem

From a purely historical standpoint this is the main difference between Popper's and Lukacs' approach to the problem of irrationalism. As argued in *Open Society and Its Enemies*, irrationalism does have a "coherent and unified" history linking Plato to Freud through Marx. The history of irrationalism he views as "the perennial revolt against freedom and reason."¹³ Accordingly, irrationalism is a perennial option for human thinking. Contrary to this, Lukacs says that "the general employment of this term [...] could rise to the false impression of a uniformly irrationalist line in the history of philosophy, such as modern irrationalism has actually tried to give",¹⁴ and argues that "a uniform term would easily blur the specific differences, and would modernize in an unacceptable way old intellectual tendencies that have little in common with those of the nineteenth century".¹⁵

The reference to "modernization", that is actualization as the obvious sign of "ahistoricity", seems as if it was addressed directly to Popper. We can easily imagine a debate between Popper and Lukacs. Though Lukacs (and Marxist historiographers in general) can be condemned as Popper for committing the fault of actualization, in the imagined debate about the history of irrationalism (whether it is perennial or a specifically modern phenomenon) Lukacs is right. The timeless and perennial irrationalism construed by Popper can only be described by certain abstract characteristics, which makes it very hard to grasp its historical differences, and primarily the specificity of modern irrationalist attacks on rationalism. Although, we know, the same historical situation inspired both *Open Society and Its Enemies* and *The Destruction of Reason*.

¹³ This seems to be Popper's favorite expression, see e.g. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. I., pp. VII.. (Preface to the first edition, 1943); Vol. II. 30.

¹⁴ George Lukács, *Op. Cit.* 105.

In the history of philosophy there are recurrent efforts to superimpose publicly available knowledge with a mystical knowledge (e.g. revelation, mystical experience, initiation, intuition, etc.) that is inaccessible to argumentative reasoning and comprehensible only for few. The prevalence and recurrence of such efforts seems to confirm Popper's interpretation of irrationalism. But mysticism is not irrationalism, though irrationalism always has mystic elements. To put it another way, modern irrationalism can indeed be called mysticism. We can say that after the rise of scientific methods of cognition, it is irrational to adhere to mystical interpretations of knowledge. The survival of, and the irrational adherence to this sort of mysticism is explained by the frustrating experience that in modern society, and, evidently, in modern science too, all problems solved inherently involve new problems. Motives and proofs coincide here: the aggregation of problems might be not only the *cause* of irrationalism but also the *proof* of the assumption that mystical knowledge is superior to the rational scientific principles of knowledge and social order; or at least that problems of life and knowledge can not be solved by reason.

This returns us to Lukacs' thought that "the general form" of irrationalism is "evasion": evasion from the problems posed by scientific progress, or as he puts it elsewhere, "evading a decisive philosophical proposition, bound up in methodology with a world-view".¹⁶ In my exposition above I wanted to point out that irrationalist penchants can be explained by the notion of "evasion".

Lukacs considers even Pascal a forerunner of irrationalism, and applies the term "evasion" in relation with his views too: "while seeing the problems, he made an about-turn precisely where his great contemporaries went on in the direction of a dialectic or at least endeavored to

¹⁵ Ibidem

go on”.¹⁷ In this characterization Pascal, “sees the problems”, but turns away from the solution followed by many. Moreover, he foresees and predicts them: “Pascal, therefore, saw both de-humanizing effects of the capitalist boom – then still occurring in the forms of feudal absolutism – and the necessary and progressive methodological consequences of the new natural sciences which were destroying the preceding world-picture’s anthropomorphism, and of the new philosophy they engendered”.¹⁸ “Evasion” here does not preclude but presuppose problem sensitivity. In Lukacs’ portrayal big irrationalist thinkers do not evade problems. They do sense the answers too but evade accepting them because of their interest, social role and other reasons. Lukacs acknowledge even Nietzsche’s problem sensitivity: “He had a special sixth sense, an anticipatory sensitivity to what the parasitical intelligentsia would need in the imperialist age, what would inwardly move and disturb it, and what kind of answer would most appease it”.¹⁹ Otherwise, it is problem sensitivity implied in “evasion” that makes sometimes irrationalist thinkers including Nietzsche so appealing for Lukacs. Though he often criticizes Nietzsche harshly, sometimes can not but admit his admiration too.

Thus the assumption that Lukacs takes a completely dim and negative view of irrationalism should slightly be modified. Conversely, it can also be stated that he does not find rationalism unproblematic. Many times he characterizes the relation of rationalism and irrationalism as if irrationalism was fostered by the weaknesses of rationalism. In other words, irrationalism is possible only thanks to the limitedness of every form of rationalism. And so, in general, every version of rationalism is limited, too, which construes the general model of rationality on the basis of certain criteria of rationality proper to concrete individual fields of thought and action. That limitedness of rationality can lead to irrationalism, and so foster irrationalist

¹⁶ George Lukács, *Op. Cit.* 104.

¹⁷ George Lukács, *Op. Cit.* 115.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*

worldviews is illustrated by the above mentioned paradoxical relationship between the rationality of subsystems and the irrationality of the overall social structure.

We should keep in mind that Lukacs conceives the paradoxical relationship of rationalism and irrationalism, described above, as an antinomy related specifically to the bourgeois world, which can only be unveiled from the standpoint of the proletariat. The model of rationality available for bourgeois philosophy is purely technical and instrumental: it is the result of capitalist rationalization of economic and power relations on the one hand, and the scientific progress based on a one-sided model of natural sciences on the other. Rationalistic versions of “bourgeois philosophy” are stuck within the realms of analytical understanding. In Lukacs’ analysis this is also “evasion”: refusing to overcome the limited rationality of “perception governed by understanding” with the help of the richer, more versatile, more general rationality of dialectic reason. Lukacs, in his Hegelian language, “the central philosophical problem of irrationalism’s entire later development, namely those questions with which irrationalism has been always connected philosophically [...] are the very questions resulting from the limitations and contradictions of thinking governed simply by understanding. If human thought detects in these limitations a problem to be solved and, as Hegel aptly states, ‘the beginning and sign of rationality’, i.e., of a higher knowledge, then the encounter with them can become the starting-point for the further development of thinking, for dialectics. Irrationalism, on the other hand [...] stops at precisely this point, absolutizes the problem, hardens the limitations of perception governed by understanding into perceptual limitations as a whole, and indeed mysticizes into a ‘supra-rational’ answer the problem thus rendered artificially insoluble.”²⁰

¹⁹ George Lukács, *Op. Cit.* 315.

Today it can not seriously be said that the weakness of rationalism, its stagnation on the level of “perception governed by understanding” stems from the structure of “bourgeois thinking” only, and that its limitedness can only be overcome with the help of proletarian worldview. Still, the relationship Lukacs laid down does exist. Moreover, it keeps reproducing in various disciplines, e.g. the philosophy of science. This is illustrated by the debates about the nature, possibility and feasibility of scientific rationality both in positivist and post-positivist philosophy of science. Its typical course was, and still is, that proposals for the reconstruction of scientific method sooner or later prove inadequate and raise the necessity of choosing between rationalist and irrationalist alternatives. Whether to describe such situations in Lukacs’s Hegelian terminology, or in a postmodern language, is only a matter of taste.

The statement that rationalism is fostered by the weaknesses and limitations of irrationalism can be put into a simpler form by saying that irrationalism is the result of rationalism. This is not far from Popper’s thesis, according to which the relationship of rationalism and irrationalism is asymmetric, since it is possible to argue rationally only for irrationalism but not for rationalism. Popper’s train of thought starts from the definition that rationalism is the readiness to accept critical arguments. Resorting to rational claims in case of conflicts thus suppose the acceptance of an argumentative attitude that can not be argued for, and which is, in this regard, the result of an irrational decision. This leads to the paradox theorem that rationalism is a belief, i.e. the “irrational *faith in reason*.”²¹

Therefore the distance between Lukacs’ and Popper’s position is not as big as it might seem. Lukacs would agree that rationalism is not opted for on the basis of rational deliberation, that is to say, there are no *reasons* for choosing rationalism. As one would expect, to the question

²⁰ George Lukács: Op. Cit. 97-8.

why and on what bases rationalism (or irrationalism) is opted for he answers “that the choice between *ratio* and *irratio* is never an ‘immanent’ philosophical question. It is not chiefly intellectual or philosophical considerations which decide thinker’s choice between the new and the old, but class situation and class allegiance.”²² So far we have seen that irrationalism is the result of arbitrary decision according to Popper, while for Lukacs it is the result of causal determination. The basis of rationalism is irrational for both of them, even if Lukacs would never admit this explicitly.

At some point I argued that it is itself irrational to believe in irrationalism. Conversely, we can add now, it is also true that accepting rationalism is rational. This, I must admit, is contrary to Popper’s and Lukacs’ views alike. Against Popper’s theory it implies that there are rational arguments for rationalism. In contrast to Lukacs’ theory it involves that there are not only causal factors, but reasons (such as evidences and the requirement of logical consistency) that support accepting rationalism.

Years ago I tried to demonstrate that there are such reasons indeed. I then called this the foundation of rationalism.²³ The term “foundation” nowadays does not sound appropriate, for it suggests foundationalism (though “founding” a belief is nothing else than arguing for it, that is to say, proving its feasibility by rational argumentation) Below I sum up this thesis in a slightly modified form.

²¹ K. R. Popper, *Op. Cit.* 1962. II. 231.

²² George Lukács, *Op. Cit.* 100.

²³ János Kelemen, „Historicism and Rationalism”. In: Hronszky-Fehér-Dayka (Eds): *Scientific Knowledge Socialized*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988. pp 347-365.

The following is to be proved. There are motives (evidences and true knowledge) such that if, in fact, we rely on them in committing ourselves to rationalism, then our choice is not irrational (neither in the sense of arbitrariness, nor in the sense of causal determination).

Such a motive may be the insight that rationality is grounded in history (moreover, in evolution) in the sense that rationalism is the product of history (and evolution). In this sense, opting for rationalism has the meaning of opting for man as a rational being shaped by history and evolution. Nevertheless, choosing irrationalism always remains an option. This means that we can deny human rationality, history and evolution.

Referring to history may trigger harsh criticism, since the statement about the irrationality of history is a blatant truism. But suggesting that history is irrational (or only arational as nature) is one thing, and suggesting that rationality is the result of history is another.

The former argument has nothing to do with the rationality or irrationality of history as such, for it does not presuppose the rationality of history, and does not tacitly exploit such a premise. On the other hand, it could easily be added that irrationalism manifesting itself in political power relations always proved to be, in accordance with the above definition of irrationalism, a radical denial of man as rational being. This is the core argument of *The Destruction of Reason*, though in its biased analyses the irrationalism of soviet totalitarianism is completely ignored. But neither the statement about what irrationalism is proved to be in the light of history is exploited in my argument, since facts and ascriptions of meaning are two different things.

In addition to historical aspects, there is another reason for choosing rationalism. It is enough to refer to the fact mentioned above: since every intentional act has a rational element it is rather the possibility of irrational acts and thoughts that are to be explained. The identification of the paradox of irrationalism in itself justifies opting for rationalism.

Just to be on the safe side let us stress again what must be supported by reasons is not rationality but choosing rationalism. Rationalism as a philosophical position is of course a matter of choice, but rationality is not. Let me quote Davidson again: “Rationality is a condition of having thoughts at all”, therefore “agents can’t *decide* whether or not to accept the fundamental attributes of rationality”.²⁴ In this light we can reach the same conclusion the previous argument lead to: irrationalism denies the rationality of man, and by this denies an elementary fact. Thus opting for irrationalism is irrational. In this regard, one can speak not only of the paradox of *irrationality*, but of *irrationalism*.

Lukacs’ story in *The Destruction of Reason* tells the same. Lukacs considers choosing irrationality irrational and paradoxical. Such a choice, in contrast to rational choices, can not be explained by reasons, but only by causes, as Lukacs does.

²⁴ Donald Davidson, „Incoherence and Irrationality. In: Donald Davidson, Op. Cit. 196.